

1Thessalonians 4: Instructions for living a life that pleases God. KV1.

Assured of their spiritual health, Paul now focuses on how they can walk to please God.

1. Call to walk in obedience to please God. 1-2

The first three chapters are narratives. In the last two chapters, they are more exhortations and are for healthy Christians like the Thessalonians. The desire to please God is already there but they must be instructed on how to do it (1). In the follow-up of young converts, such practical instructions are vitally important. Paul has indeed instructed them and they are the commandments referred to in v2, which would be reviewed in chapters 4-5. Paul is not just calling for obedience but also to grow, which is to do it more and more.

2. Living in sexual purity. 3-8

The first set of commands relates to sexual immorality from which we must abstain (**3-4**). Abstain in Greek is “apecho” meaning to hold back. Self control is assumed in this word and it is an absolute essential for avoiding sexual immorality. Furthermore, v4 states that we must know how to possess our vessel in sanctification. To know involves learning and thus the exercise of self control have to be learnt, which is realizing our individual weaknesses and when to “flee immorality” (1Cor. 6:18). But what is “vessel” in v4? Some believe that it’s referring to one’s wife. However the passage is written to “each of you” and *not* just to husbands. Therefore it’s better to take this as one’s body. This also fits with **v5-6** which are commands on what not to do. The first is not to possess our body in “lustful passion” which is just the flip side of self control. In fact, it’s hard to envisage how this can apply to one’s wife. The other is not, to transgress or defraud a brother in this matter. If we allow free reign to our sexual urges, others can be hurt and Paul warns that God will be the avenger. In **v7-8**, Paul explains the real significance of rejecting sexual purity. Interestingly he stated that it is rejecting God who gives us the Holy Spirit. Why bring in the Holy Spirit? It must be related to the struggle against immorality. The flesh is weak and self control can fail. So, the Holy Spirit is given to help and victory is possible (Romans 8:13). If we shun the struggle, it is rejecting the help of the Holy Spirit.

3. The practice of brotherly love. 9-12

Brotherly love is next and Paul mentioned that this is already taught by God (**9-10**). He must be referring to the command of Christ in John 13:33-34 so that no further directives are needed. Love is always seeking to help others but Paul now wants a balance whereby we must seek also to attend to one’s affairs and be self-dependant (**11-12**). The Greek for quiet is “hesuchazo” which are actions that do not bother others. This is to avoid the exploitation of Christian love which will be further discussed in 2Thessalonians 3:11-12.

4. Explaining how those who died will still participate in Christ’s return. 13-18

It was unclear how Christians who died can participate in Christ’s return. So Paul informs them on an event not revealed before (**13-15**). They will be resurrected to meet Christ in mid-air but the living believers will also be caught up with them (**16-17**). This is the rapture and it is a different event from Christ’s return, when He will land on earth to battle the antichrist. In fact Christ will bring all believers with Him on His return.

Lesson to Ponder: The rapture is revealed to comfort believers (**18**). So use it that way.

1Thessalonians 5: A community waiting for Christ's return. KV 11

In 1:9-10, Paul refers to them as a model church that turns from idols to wait for Christ's return. He ends the letter with instructions on how to wait as God's holy community.

1. A charge to be ready for the day of the Lord. 1-10

This seems to be a continuation of the section in 4:13-18 but there are some distinct differences. In the previous section, Paul is answering a question over believers who died but the instructions here are for those alive and are waiting for Christ's coming. This is the focus of the chapter as it also ends with a benediction on His return (23). Paul starts with the issue on the timing of His return (1-3). Unlike the previous section, no special revelation such as on the rapture is needed for Paul had already instructed them on the subject. "The day of the Lord" refers to the period when the Lord will directly intervene and consummate His redemption. It comes like a thief meaning that it will be sudden and unpredictable. The period includes Christ's return but other passages show that within it is also the tribulation (Joel 2:8-3:6; 2Thess. 2:2) and it would terminate at the end of the present world (2Peter 3:10). In this section, it is discussed after the rapture in 4:16-18, suggesting that this is when it begins. This harmonizes well, for many details on "the day of Lord" are in the Bible such as in Revelation, making them predictable once the period starts. It is the beginning just after the rapture that is unpredictable. Thus, we must always be alert (4-8). The key is to fully control ourselves and in v8 to have faith, love and hope, the three great Christian virtues. It simply means to actively walk with Christ, for we are destined to live with Him, whether alive or dead, either here or in eternity (9-10).

2. Relating with one another. 11-15

Paul firstly gives them a general principle, namely to encourage and build up one another (11). He then instructed them on their leaders (12-13). Note that elders and deacons were not mentioned probably because Paul's time in the city was too brief to make these appointments. However leaders did emerge even without the formal process and if they are evidently sent by God, they should be esteemed. Finally some problematic areas were discussed, including when to admonish and never to repay evil for evil (14-15).

3. Proper attitude towards circumstances. 16-22

The next three commands are short and crisp and the context suggests that they are related (16-18). It basically prescribes the responses of the Christian community to circumstances. Indeed we rejoice, keep praying and thank God for it. The critical demand however is that it must be "always" and for every circumstance. Finally v19-22 deals with the special situation of spiritual manifestations including prophetic utterances. It is wrong to be close minded and they should not be quenched. However equally vital is to test all these vigorously so that every form of evil can be avoided (22).

4. Benediction and final words.

It is a relief to note that our preservation till Christ's return is based on God's faithfulness (23-24). Yet we must strive to help one another and even Paul appeals for prayers (25-28)

Lesson to Ponder: When should we admonish a brother? Only if he willfully breaks the rules! Not if he is depressed or weak, when encouragement or help is to be offered (14).

Revelation 11: Ministry of the two witnesses during the Tribulation. KV 3

The two witnesses prepare Christ's second coming as John the Baptist did for the first. They are the return of Moses and Elijah as promise in the OT (Deut. 18:15; Mal. 4:5).

1. The ministry of the two witnesses. 1-13

John is to measure the temple which must be the ministry base of the two witnesses **(1-2)**. It is the OT temple or "heiron" in Greek, to be rebuilt in Jerusalem before the tribulation. However here the word "naos" is used, which refers only to the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant and God reside. In v1, the worshippers and altar are also to be measured. As only Jews are required to worship in the temple, they are most likely the 144,000 led by the two witnesses and the altar, their area of worship. Measuring indicates God's special favor and protection which is supported by v3 as the area not measured is given to the nations. These are the forces of the antichrist for he will take over the temple in middle of the tribulation (2Thess 2:3-4, Dan. 9:27). In fact Jerusalem will also be his capital and thus in v8 the city is called Sodom and Egypt implying unrestrained sins and resistant to God. A key problem is to explain how the Jewish believers can worship in a small Holy of Holies, especially with the antichrist in control of the temple. All this can harmonize if the Holy of Holies is again on the move just like the tabernacle in the OT. It could happen if the Ark of the Covenant is rediscovered and reinstated in the OT temple. When the antichrist captures Jerusalem for the 42 months in v2, the two witnesses and their followers then took it with them to hide in the mountains. Support for this may be found in two strong Greek words "exballo exothen" translated as "leave out" in v2. This is too soft for literally it is to "expel outside" and it can indicate a separation of the Holy of Holies from the other temple courts. Furthermore it harmonizes with the nature of their ministry in **v3-6**. They are to prophesy for 1260 days and it is hard to imagine how they could do this in the temple of Jerusalem dominated by the antichrist. Furthermore as olive trees and lampstands provide respectively spiritual nourishment and guidance, it will be difficult if they are not on the move. They appear to be in conflict with evil forces but have immense power for self protection, even devouring their enemies with fire (5-6). Their powers over nature seem unlimited striking the world with any disaster they so desire (6). It's like Moses' plagues in Egypt and the turmoil's from the seals and trumpets so far could all be resulting from them in their struggle with the antichrist. This explains why the world hates them and celebrates their deaths (10). However on completion of their work they will be killed **(7-10)**. Their killer is now specified to be the antichrist described as the beast from the abyss because of his demonic powers. Their bodies are desecrated in a city that must be Jerusalem because this is where Christ was crucified (8). However they were resurrected in a great demonstration of God's power **(11-13)**. Many gave glory to God, who must be all over the world. The 144,000 can be used to reach them and perhaps for this final evangelistic drive, the last trumpet in 10:4 is delayed.

2. The worship and blowing of the seventh trumpet. 14-19

The seventh trumpet sounded **(14-15)**, with the usual round of heavenly worship **(16-18)**. In **v19**, the heavenly temple is the one which the OT tabernacle is a copy. Note the ark for it suggests that there can be one on earth as stated above. The bowls come next in 15:5-8.

Lesson to Ponder: Just know that the darkest hour of the witnesses' death is *not* the end.